



NEWS

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Office of the Secretary

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Interior Department Seeks Legislation for Establishing a National Heritage Area Program

WASHINGTON - Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton announced today that the Bush administration is proposing legislation to promote and enhance community and regional heritage conservation efforts and to establish a National Heritage Area program.

Testifying before the U.S. Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, Subcommittee on National Parks, Deputy Director of the National Park Service Randy Jones asked that Congress consider establishing criteria for future proposed National Heritage Areas--a requirement that must be met before the Secretary of the Interior recommends their creation.

"To be successful, National Heritage Areas must be guided and supported by local communities and the people who live in them. These areas also must work closely with all partners in the region, including federal land-management agencies," Jones said. "This is of particular importance in the West, where a National Heritage Area boundary may encompass federal land designated for many uses."

Jones noted that the National Heritage Area strategy is about fostering a partnership culture at every level of government, with each level having appropriate and complementary roles. The National Park Service should be the lead partner only when the resources within a proposed heritage area are of national importance.

"To ensure a constructive partnership, our legislative proposal requires the consultation and concurrence of federal land-management agencies within the boundaries of a proposed National Heritage Area," Jones testified. "In addition to clarifying respective missions, this process of consultation will help identify potential partnerships as envisioned by the administration's recent Preserve America Executive Order. Under this initiative, local communities and public land partners will collaborate for the promotion of local economic development and heritage tourism through the preservation and productive reuse of historic assets."

According to a draft GAO report, no criteria have been adopted for determining the significance or importance of National Heritage Area proposals. The department's legislative proposal addresses this concern by limiting involvement to regions that have a collection of resources that together tell nationally important stories based on our country's heritage.

The proposed legislation presented to Congress today would require a feasibility study be conducted for a proposed new National Heritage Area to demonstrate that the area contains the important components that tell a nationally important story.

Successful National Heritage Areas embody locally driven partnerships that emphasize local control of land use and blend education, cultural conservation, resource preservation, recreation and community revitalization. Jones noted that at its best, the collaborative approach of the National Heritage Area concept embodies Secretary Norton's "Four Cs" – Communication, Consultation and Cooperation, all in the service of Conservation.

"Recent studies and our own experiences have shown that the National Heritage Area approach links people and place, nature and culture, and the present with the past. National heritage areas capitalize on the unique role local communities play in caring for their heritage and telling their stories, Jones said. "Our legislative proposal respects these principles. It also recognizes the need to target our assistance to those areas where there is a national interest and where the local partners meet established criteria for success.

National Heritage Areas are intended to preserve nationally important natural, cultural, historic and recreational resources by creating local, state and federal partnerships. While the federal government through the National Park Service provides technical and financial assistance, National Heritage Areas are locally initiated and managed areas that do not impose any new federal regulations or involve any federal land acquisition.

There are currently 24 National Heritage Areas in 18 states. More information on National Heritage Areas is available online at <http://www.cr.nps.gov/heritageareas/>

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